

Longing For the Courts of the Lord

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What does it mean for us to “go to church”? The phrase literally means to go to the assembly, but for some it has as much to do with obligation, fear, and guilt as it does honor, praise, and worship. Our attitude toward worship will go a long way toward our relationship with God, for our communion with the divine is directly linked with our assembly in the flesh (1 Corinthians 14:15). Unfortunately, as a culture we have strayed very far from a proper attitude toward worship. For some, worship is only about punching a proverbial time card, getting our “worship points” and going home. For others, it is about entertainment, self-fulfillment, and worldliness. The focus has shifted from truly recognizing and praising God to achieving some kind of superficial emotional “high”. Ask yourself a few questions:

- Do I actually want to be here?
- Do I actually want to serve God?
- Do I actually recognize Him for what He has done in my life?
- Am I willing to put personal preference aside and let worship be about Him only?
- Am I fixated by the physical trappings of worship? The building, the people around me, the singing, the technology, the age/class/race of the preacher?
- Am I able to put distractions aside and truly devote my heart to God in a way that is both mentally and spiritually meaningful?
- Is my mind stimulated as much as my spirit, or vice-versa?
- When I am not in this building, am I still worshipping God in my actions, like Romans 12:1 instructs?

“How lovely are Thy dwelling places, O Lord of hosts! My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. The bird also has found a house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even Thine altars, O Lord of hosts, my King and my God. How blessed are those who dwell in Thy house! They are ever praising Thee... For a day in Thy courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God, than dwell in the tents of wickedness” (Psalm 84:1-4,10). Compared to the author’s attitude toward worship, we sometimes seem trite in our treatment of God. Can we say the same thing about the service, in our day and age of accomplished revelatory perfection (Hebrews 8:6, 2 Peter 1:3), that he did under the imperfect old law? He never saw the fullness of the promises, as we have in these latter days, yet he longed to praise God so incredibly that his zeal is remembered to this day. His words in this psalm are a testament to the love that he had for God, and the joy he felt by worshipping the King of kings.

- Even though the psalmist’s worship was framed by the Old Testament commands and ordinances, there is no doubt that his worship had the potential to be just as sincere as worship under the New Covenant. *“Now even the first covenant had regulations of divine worship and the earthly sanctuary”* (Hebrews 9:1). Even though it was admittedly the temporary covenant, the Old Law was

still designed and implemented by Divine decree. So if the writer could feel this way about worshipping God through the medium of animal sacrifices, incense, and limitations because of his tribal birth (for only priests could enter certain holy places in the temple), how much more vibrant should our worship be since we ourselves are priests (1 Peter 2:9), and our worship is enacted on better promises than the first (Hebrews 8:6)?

- When we read this psalm, do we really take to heart the obvious modern applications? Do you think the psalmist would be the kind of person today who would miss more Sundays than not? Would he dress sloppily to church today? Would he forget that he was scheduled to lead songs? Would he complain if the service went five minutes past time?
- Even though the psalmist is speaking of an earthly dwelling place for God (the temple in Jerusalem), it is clear that he did not need a glorious gold-encrusted temple to feel like his worship was special and valuable to God. Even though God is not confined to dwell in a place made with human hands, He does dwell wherever there is righteousness and truth being practiced (Matthew 18:20), regardless of the setting.